

Friends of Science in Medicine

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Issue 6



Special Interest Articles:

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- University of Sydney dissociates itself from IMGateway website
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What's new since our last newsletter?

Positive action from Chiropractic Board of Australia

The Chiropractic Board of Australia has launched a widespread crackdown on anti-vaccination elements within the profession, ordering practitioners to remove all anti-inoculation material from websites and clinics, cutting some CPD-approved courses and conducting random audits. **FSM** is pleased to see

this development as it has, from its inception, argued that health interventions, especially those that involve potentially serious diseases and attract taxpayer funding, should be required to demonstrate their scientific validity before they are promoted and administered to patients.

Macquarie University dumps chiropractic degree

Macquarie University is one of four Australian universities that hosts a Chiropractic degree - but not for much longer.

Macquarie chiropractic course material for vaccination which included references to Wakefield's now discredited study that linked Vaccination to Autism.

In April they sent out a media announcement that they were off-loading this degree by 2015. The new Vice Chancellor of Macquarie, Professor Bruce Downton "served as a pediatrician at the Massachusetts General Hospital for Children, and as Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School."

RMIT, Central Queensland University and Murdoch University, still run degree courses in Chiropractic.

However, Macquarie University still hosts courses on a so-called, "chiropractic adjustment device". One of their academics reviewed the ARTG listed 'Activator' percussion device and agreed that it was "at best, an expensive placebo". It remains widely used by chiropractors to remove the now discredited 'subluxations' and to lengthen children's legs. (See also the ABC program Catalyst mentioned below on "Are chiropractors putting babies at risk? A special report into the ambitions of the chiropractic industry.")

FSM received a copy of some of the



University of Sydney dissociates itself from IMGateway website

FSM wrote to the Vice Chancellor (VC), University of Sydney, to bring his attention to his University's logo on [IMGateway's website](#) along with a list of University staff who the website claimed were

IMGateway's scientific advisors. Owned by Unity Health, IMGateway promotes a wide range of alternative medicine interventions that **FSM** believes are questionable.

We received a positive response from the VC and these references have now been removed. A good outcome.

Nursing & Midwifery – anti-vaccination content in textbook

New **FSM** Executive member, Joanne Benhamu, RN was in [the news](#) after discovering a section in one of the core midwifery texts used in Australian universities, directing students & practicing midwives to anti-vaccination organisation, the Australian Vaccination Network as a "non-government source of information".

NSW College of Midwives Executive member, Professor Hannah Dahlen was quoted in [Australian Doctor](#):

"[A student] would be smart enough to know that anything from the NHMRC and the

Ministry of Health is usually based on evidence and has a public health interest, and she would quickly cotton on to the fact that there are some fairly radical views on the AVN site."

NSW Health Minister Jillian Skinner called for the book to be withdrawn in NSW.

Joanne received a response from Minister Hames (WA) on the midwifery text, stating that the Western Australian Department of Health (DOH) had written to the Heads of School of the midwifery education programs: *"The coordinators of the midwifery education programs have also*

been contacted and advised that students should be made aware of the misleading reference in the text."

However, the WA DOH also stated that they will not be requesting universities to withdraw the textbook as it is now *"being rewritten and any reference to the AVN will be excluded in the new edition"*.

FSM feels that this is a successful outcome and awaits the response of Health departments in other states.

FSM would also like to hear of similar inappropriate inclusions in other textbooks.



Core midwifery text: Midwifery: Preparation for Practice

Request for review of Chiropractic & Osteopathic Boards of Australia

FSM made two submissions to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) requesting reviews of the actions of the Chiropractic Board of Australia (CBA) and the Osteopathic Board of Australia (OBA). The reports raised serious questions about the integrity of both the CBA and the OBA. Consequently, their ability to discharge their statutory obligation to protect the public from inappropriate and unjustifiable behaviour on the part of many of their registrants was also brought into question.

A review of the 360 courses approved by the CBA for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

identified that up to one-third of courses were based on pseudoscience or made exaggerated claims of efficacy.

'Cranial osteopathy' is a belief that there is a 'cranial rhythm' in the cranium, sacrum, cerebrospinal fluid and membranes enveloping the 'craniosacral system'; that they can be detected and measured only by their practitioner's hands; and that good health requires the 'balance' and 'flow' of this rhythm. **FSM** identified a number of 'cranial osteopathy' courses for common childhood conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), asthma, allergies, bed-wetting, colic and ear infection, all of

which are commonly referred to on osteopathic websites as conditions amenable to cranial manipulation. Other courses identified include obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, visceral osteopathy and osteopathic neurology.

FSM asked AHPRA to investigate the CBA and the OBA and to seriously consider dismissing their current Boards.

Both [Victoria University](#) and [RMIT](#) osteopathy degrees promote cranial osteopathy.

"...up to one-third of courses were based on pseudoscience or made exaggerated claims of efficacy."

Therapeutic Goods Administration

FSM responded to the second wave of consultation on the changes to Premarket Medical Device Assessment. The TGA's "exposure draft" recommends: *"Changing premarket assessment of medical devices through targeted selection of Class IIb implantable and long term surgically invasive medical devices for mandatory audit, and targeted selection of Class III and AIMD devices for Level 3 audit, staged publication of all medical device decisions and abolition of TGA conformity assessment for all medical devices (except Class 4 IVDs)"*

FSM's submission rejected this recommendation, as it failed to address any issues relating to the hundreds of

disproven and unproven 'low risk' medical devices, that are used daily by thousands of alternative practitioners to diagnose and treat some of our most vulnerable Australians, including children, seniors, cancer patients and people with chronic pain, putting patient health at risk while undermining patient/doctor relationships, often at considerable financial costs.

In many cases, these devices are used as part of 'Consultations' which attract private health fund rebates, and in some instances, Medicare Chronic Disease Management rebates.

FSM submitted a response to the "Consultation Regulation Impact Statement Regulating the advertising of therapeutic

goods to the general public" which sought public comment *"to help inform the Australian Government in decision making on proposed regulatory reforms to improve the management of public health risks in relation to the advertising of therapeutic goods to the general public"*. We stated that we strongly encouraged their efforts for real and effective change and support the contention that an improved regulatory framework could be achieved if changes were made to the pre-approvals arrangements, to the complaints handling processes and to the sanctions and penalties that apply to advertising breaches. Our submission will be published on the TGA website in due course.

"FSM's submission rejected this recommendation, as it failed to address any issues relating to the hundreds of disproven and unproven 'low risk' medical devices..."

Position statements on interventions

FSM has added a section on our website for position statements for alternative therapies. This will eventually include chiropractic, osteopathic, acupuncture and Chinese Traditional Medicine. We will alert *Friends* when these documents are published.

University of the Third Age (U3A)

FSM received an email from a concerned *Friend* that their local U3A had invited a naturopath to run a workshop. The practitioner, a registered nurse, was previously investigated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration's Complaints Resolution Panel who upheld seven complaints against her, including claims for screening breast cancer. An investigation by **FSM** identified at least eight U3A's that have held courses which topics such as in 'a different approach to cancer', acupuncture & acupressure, allergy remedies, aromatherapy, Bowen

therapy, Chinese Traditional Medicine, chiropractic, crystal healing, homeopathy, iridology, kinesiology, naturopathy, osteopathy, reflexology and Reiki.

FSM does not think that this is responsible and may harm the health of cancer patients. Oncology patients are particularly vulnerable to the claims made by proponents of alternative remedies, often commercially driven therapies that mostly benefit the therapists. Without the knowledge that these alternative therapies are not evidence-based, some may delay effective treatment and

be given false hope of positive outcomes. In May, **FSM** wrote to The Hon. Professor Barry Jones, a former Minister for Science & Technology and Patron, U3A Alliance Australia, about *"Concerns about the increase in pseudo-science-based health courses in U3A"*.

We will keep you posted on his response.

"...at least eight U3As have held courses on 'a different approach to cancer'"



Are the RACGP and Dept of Health and Ageing endorsing pseudoscience?

"... 'Health Heroes' is a campaign aimed at encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to consider careers in health.."

We would like to applaud the efforts of *Friend*, Dr Martin Tio, who took the initiative of investigating an Australian College of Natural and Environmental Medicine (ACNEM) course approved by the RACGP for CPD, which included anti-vaccination misinformation and links to the AVN. This prompted a series of articles in the Sydney Morning Herald ([Discredited vaccination claims injected into GP training](#)), Australian Doctor ([College denies endorsing anti-vax education & Have you seen quackery promoted?](#)) and the Medical Observer ([RACGP under fire over anti-vax CPD info](#)). Other pseudo-science courses targeting GPs have also been identified including courses from the [Mindd Foundation](#) on [detox and chelation](#).

A few weeks later, Dr Tio put his investigative skills to work again, this time on a website run by the Department of Health and Ageing. 'Health Heroes' is a campaign aimed at encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to consider careers in health. The website described a number of alternative health care interventions, such as chiropractic for their ["specialised work such as...paediatrics"](#), acupuncturists who ["treat disorders and illnesses by inserting fine needles into the skin to stimulate the body's defence mechanisms"](#) and natural therapists who use iridology to examine ["the iris \(coloured part of the eye\) to analyse and treat illness in various organs of the body"](#).

Other 'Health Heroes' career descriptions included homeopaths who ["prescribe medicines and therapeutic treatments to assist the body's natural tendency to heal itself"](#), Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners to ["harmonise the body's vital energies into functioning together using traditional massage, heat, moisture, acupuncture and herbs to ensure the correct distribution of energy throughout the body"](#), osteopaths to treat asthma and reflexologists to diagnose and treat patients through their feet.

FSM wrote to the department and received an email from them that our *"feedback is appreciated and the roles you have highlighted have been removed pending a further review of this content."* Another successful outcome!

FSM appreciates the time and effort Dr Tio put into his investigations and encourages others to let us know if they find any other outrageous nonsense on government health websites.

If you see any Government websites that are promoting alternative medicine, please let us know: info@scienceinmedicine.org.au



Anti-vaccination news

Since the last newsletter there has been considerable activity involving issues about anti-vaccination.

Unfortunately, the number of children recorded with a parental conscientious objection to vaccination is on the rise. In an attempt to counteract this trend, the Federal Government has changed the name of the 'Immunisation exemption conscientious objection form' to 'vaccine refusers' with parents who use the form being required to see a GP to discuss vaccination with them.

FSM remains concerned about the AVN, who continue to offer a 'buddy' system so that "vaccine refusers" do not lose their \$726 Family Tax Benefit. The AVN system invites those who have

already been through the "vaccine refusers" system to accompany parents to see their GP to get the form signed. The AVN is also recommending that parents pay \$25 to join the Church of Conscious Living, which was set up with the express purpose of providing 'believers' with a 'religious exemption' from vaccination.

Media coverage included SBS Television, TodayTonight and over twenty newspaper and magazines articles. With nearly 80,000 children not fully immunised, anti-vaccination dogma remains an important area of concern. The closure of a legal loophole, that allowed the AVN to defy the Health Care Complaint Commission (HCCC) in NSW will undoubtedly renew action against them as they continue to spread "misleading and dangerous" information.

FSM hopes that more consumer protection laws will be passed throughout Australia, to protect babies and children.

FSM supports the move to introduce legislation that would allow preschools to ban unvaccinated children, as long as exemptions are allowed on medical grounds and for genuine conscientious objectors.



"number of children recorded with a parental conscientious objection to vaccination is on the rise"

FSM in the media



The prestigious science show Catalyst ran a show titled Chiropractors asking the question *"Are chiropractors putting babies at risk? A special report into the ambitions of the chiropractic industry."* Prof John Dwyer, Dr John Cunningham and Dr Mick Vagg were able to contribute to the content of this important story which exposes the ambitions of the Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) to be the first choice in primary care as they encourage their members to target babies and children with claims that chiropractic adjustments can treat a wide range of childhood diseases including Autism and that it is a substitute for vaccination.

If you missed it, we suggest you take the time to watch this segment:

(<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/3801081.htm>).

Vaccination issues were the biggest NEWS during the past four months, with a number of our *Friends* interviewed or writing articles, resulting in over 20 publications. Many of the articles related to the Australian Vaccination Network (AVN) who host a website which claims that vaccination is linked to autism, allergies and SIDS. The AVN is also being challenged by the Department of Fair Trading to change its misleading name. **FSM Friends** include a number of members of the Stop the AVN (SAVN), with their motto of *"Vaccination saves lives"* they work tirelessly to expose the AVN activities and have having some success.

FSM Announcements

The **FSM** list now includes a Nobel Prize winner!

We are delighted to welcome Professor Peter C. Doherty AC, PhD, MVSc, BVSc, Nobel Prize (Physiology or Medicine) as a *Friend*.

At our last meeting, two new members were appointed to the **FSM** Executive; both from NSW they are:

Dr Sue Ieraci, (Public Hospital Emergency Physician, Senior Staff Specialist, Emergency Medicine, Bankstown Hospital) and,

Joanne Benhamu BN RN, (Clinical Trials Coordinator, Radiation Oncology, Royal North Shore Hospital).

They have both already made important contributions to challenging pseudoscience.

Joanne is running the new **FSM** Twitter account [@FriendsofSciMed](#). This complements the [FSM Facebook Page](#) which was set up and run by a *Friend* early in 2012, and which now has nearly 900 followers.

We encourage you to participate in these important social media and to invite your colleagues to do so as well. They are useful tools for generating discussion and are updated regularly with news items which will be of interest to *Friends*.

Joanne was also invited to present a paper at the international [TAM! conference](#) run by the James Randi Educational Foundation in Las Vegas.

"We encourage you to participate in these important social media and to invite your colleagues to do so as well."

Correspondence from new Friends

Following the Macquarie University announcement that they are off-loading their chiropractic degree, a new *Friend* emailed **FSM**:

"There is a new broom at Macquarie University (their new Vice Chancellor) who is thankfully appalled at the rank corporatization that has been propagated over the last few years, including offering courses that are money-spinners regardless of scientific merit. He has taken some brave decisions".

Another new *Friend* wrote to us saying:

"If there is anything I can do for the Friends of Science in Medicine in the future please don't hesitate to ask."

This is the type of response **FSM** really appreciates.

We are also getting great feedback to our newsletters such as:

"Excellent—great level of activity—it's good to have a vehicle for fighting back against this tripe."

For those of you who send up feedback, thank you for your comments. Remember you can help by enrolling more *Friends* and by writing media pieces. The bigger our voice the more we are likely to influence positively public, colleagues and regulatory bodies.

Acknowledgements

A big thanks to *Friends* who have had articles published or were in the news or on current affairs programs recently. Please let **FSM** know if you have published any relevant articles or have been on radio or TV programs.

Recent contributions include:

- Dr Matthew Brown **Too Open to Ideas?** ('The Bitter Pill' – Australasian Science)
- Prof David Colquhoun **Acupuncture is a theatrical placebo: the end of a myth** (dcsience.Net)
If a medical cure looks to good to be true, it probably is (The Guardian—UK)
- Prof Marcello Costa **Is complementary medicine a valid alternative?** ('The Bitter Pill' - Australian Science)
- Dr Rachael Dunlop **Six myths about vaccination – and why they're wrong** (The Conversation)
A view on Vaccination myths (The Conversation)
- Professor John Dwyer **When “Healing Hands” Start Grasping** ('The Bitter Pill' - Australasian Science)
- Prof Edzard Ernst **Alternative medicine for kids: when is it child-abuse?** (edzardernst.com)
Alternative diagnostic techniques: like bogus bomb-detectors? (edzardernst.com)
- Loretta Marron **Detox - dubious devices, diets and drainage** (I2P)
- Dr Michael Vagg **Monday's medical myth: you can think yourself better** (The Conversation)

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info@scienceinmedicine.org.au



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PO Box 631, Morayfield, QLD, 4506